

TEENS and TWENTIES

RUSSELL Bhai, the elder brother of my friend Shanto, has been studying at a private medical college in the suburbs.

He has always been a boy with much talents. But never had the reputation of doing hard work. His mother used to get annoyed with his constant hanging out with friends and used to complain: "This son of mine will become a martyr for friends."

Of course he was a delightful man. It was always nice to be in his company. He was an expert at entertainment — a real party guy. Studies, according to him, are important, but they should never dictate your life. He was seldom seen at the study table and when he came out with good results in both SSC and HSC, everyone was surprised.

I had never seen him studying. Either he was out of doors or he was in his room playing heavy metal or hard rock and reading magazines or story books. But today when I went to his house, I could not hear the usually deafening noises. Instead, I heard the slow music of Kenny G.

I was sure something was wrong. He lay on his makeshift bed consisting of a mattress only and was staring at the ceiling philosophically. I went up to him and saw a gloomy face. I could not help asking him what was wrong. But before that I had to build up a conversation.

"How do you like it there, Bhaiya?"

"Well, it's a secluded place; far away from modern civilization although it is only one and a half hour's drive from Dhaka. It is pretty weird as well. At times we go for days without any patient, and then as a village feud takes place our hospital gets flooded with patients — all with severe injuries."

It seemed that his mind had wandered off somewhere else. He started again:

"Dear brother, so long as you are a teenager, enjoy life. The older you grow the more the reality of life unfolds. It is not pleasant at all."

I had never heard him speaking in such a tone. I asked him what made him feel so serious about life.

We were quiet for some time. Then he spoke up: "I am being tormented by a bizarre experience. Would you like to hear about it?"

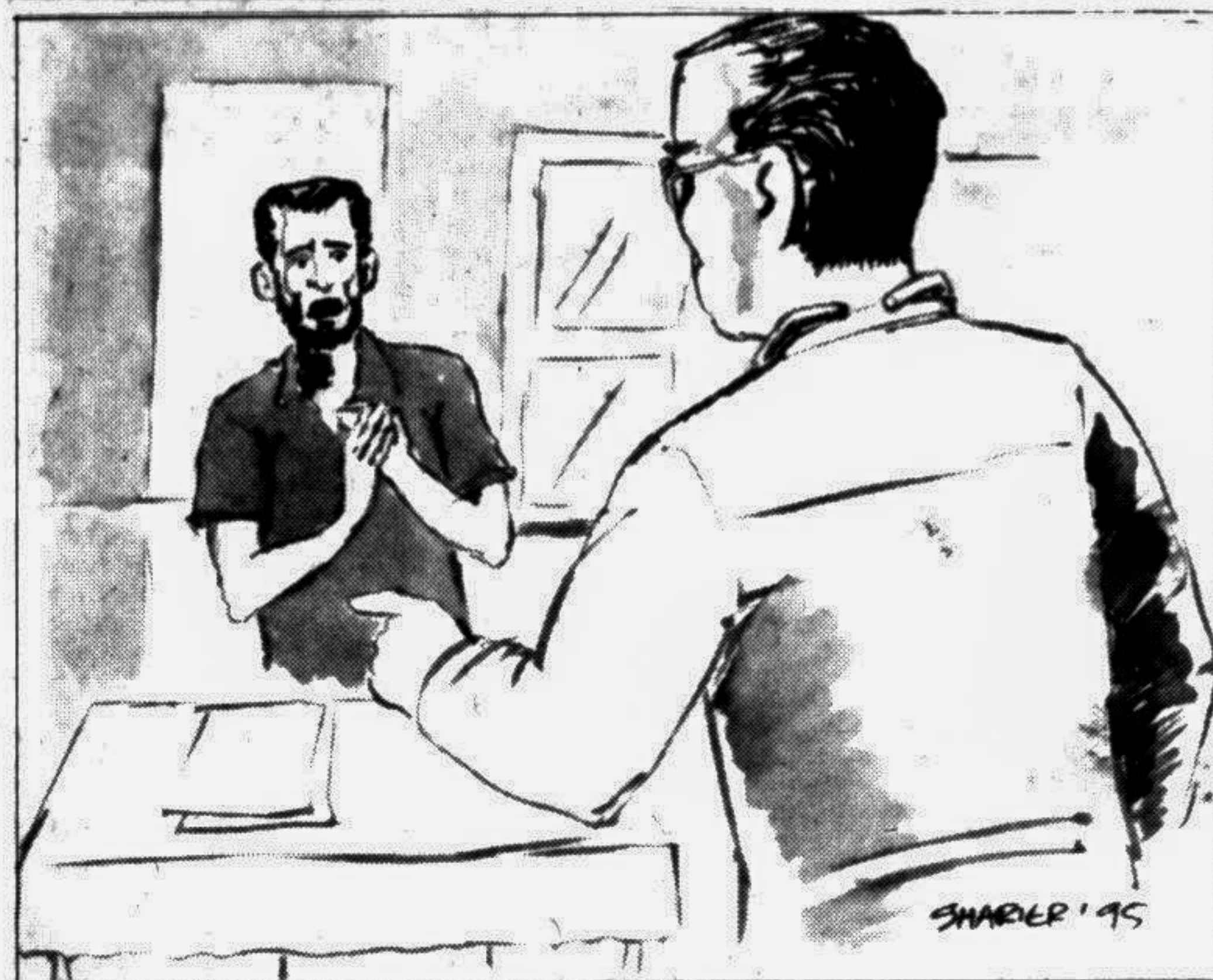
The Price of Carcass

by Sumit Roy Choudhury

Assuming my silence as a positive sign, he continued: "I joined this med-school in order to be with my best friends, as you know. But I now wish I had got into Dhaka Medical College. Maybe the truth of life would not reveal itself so soon." "What happened?" I inquired.

"I had just been there for about two months when I met an old farmer named Kashem Ali. The poor fellow had an acute kidney malfunction."

"In the two months that followed I found out that Kashem Ali had to come up with a dowry of Tk 20000 in order to marry his daughter to an educated man. He told me that at least one of his daughters would get a chance to have a good life rather than being the wife of another farmer, who would have to do back-breaking jobs all day and would have to endure the beatings of a tired and insensitive husband. I felt pity for him and cursed the man who was such a culture in spite of his education."



tion for which he was going to die unless he had a transplant or was hooked up to a dialysis machine. Both required a fat sum to be spent. No medicine could help it. He was diagnosed with diabetes two years ago, but his careless lifestyle aggravated his situation. Slowly he came closer to the jaws of death. I saw the man crying as

I went to my teacher Dr Haider and asked him whether it was possible in any way to give him free treatment. I believed he would do something because I knew he had a kind heart. He said "Well, no free treatment is done here," then stopped for a moment and pondered, "But maybe there is a way out." It was arranged that

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Kashem Ali came regularly to the hospital, got hooked up to a dialysis machine, and then went about his daily routine of hard work. He came up with the sum of the dowry and the date of the marriage was set.

Then further tragedy struck. The poor farmer died just two days before the big day. When the family members learned about the arrangements they were transferred to a state of hysteria. The daughter, Latifa, for whom he had done all this, but it was all in black and white.

The body was prepared for dissection after application of chemicals and preservatives. Two days after the death Kashem's body was ready for us to work upon. But then it happened.

I was woken up by the sound of several people crying outside I went there and found that half of the village was there, headed by Kashem's family. They had brought all the money meant for the dowry and also money that was raised by selling part of their land. They requested the doctors to take the money and give the body back so that they could pay their last respects to the departed soul and bury him. But the rules forbade such a transacting. So it could not be done. The legal implications of the deal left no room for manoeuvring.

The daughter cried out saying, "How can I marry and begin a new life with the money my father made by selling his own body?" Nobody could answer her. There was no way to comfort these unfortunate people.

I could not eat for the next two days. We did not even touch Kashem's body. There was a gloomy spell over the whole of the college. Then in about two days everyone recovered and went about their own jobs. We forgot what had happened. Life went on its course twisting and turning in search of another victim like Kashem."

The account had a depressing effect on me. It was hard for me to believe to what abysmal depths poverty could lead a man. It made me feel that life was just a harsh practical joke.

Being Human

by Md Atiqussaman

It is a particular age, particular time that I am passing through; and my strenuous effort to have an unprejudiced view on myself and my surroundings, is something which makes life more interesting.



I would rather say, people of my age behave mostly like a rising Hindi film-star (!): Always trying to get noticed. A young man must have a girl beside him, if he wants himself to be noticed, though he does not know exactly what to do while accompanying his mother at the Green Super Market.

The young boy must have at least half of the words he utters in English. He shows off torn jeans and longhair or bandanas and earrings.

The other day, a hawker at New Market approached from our back and offered lingerie to my male-friend. Well, it was all the hawker's fault, as I explained to my long haired friend.

The hawkers ought to know that, all the young men of Dhaka are going have longer hair, and girls will be having shorter, while the spiritually disturbed persons (loitering around Farm Gate bridge and High Court Mazar) are going to be a bit confused. In addition, a young boy should have an appreciable number of girlfriends to phone him and they should all find his phone always engaged. He must be available at any of the fast food shops or parties or concerts, whichever available on any particular night.

At a midnight party, this young man is the only one left conscious enough to suck the bottom of a simple beer can, and he is later fondly named a 'fish'. If by any chance, he does not have a living company by him, he will sure have a guitar. Doesn't matter if the instrument lacks a few strings, but it's still strong and noisy enough to maintain an ever-changing neighbourhood.

There is still much of time left. Time to study, specially. But, he obviously needs the TV to be on music helps to concentration, that's only scientific. So, the young man studies

(!) while Madonna sings (!!) with a few of her clothes on.

There is an exclusive time for men; a few girls, who rarely remember their womanhood might also attend. Bottles of pensidyll, or files of tablet and the journey to heaven is surprisingly cheap.

Don't believe it? Compare it with your school fees, that too if you don't know your father's bank balance. The latter increases more frequently, though. Then, while you are signing "Churaliya" to the pretty angel in 'heaven', your father might accidentally discover you crawling on the highway. Can't blame him anyway. Efficient or inefficient, parents are not connoisseurs of these divine tastes. Passers-by of today overlook these scenes. After all, these are young men with bottles, trying to be Aristotles.

If you argue with these young men, they would confidently say, 'c'mon man (you better be a man), give me a break! The world's changing, views are changing, time's changed already. Society is now different, which you can't adapt to. Go and get some experience, buddy; if you want to survive.

The points they try to make are quite strong alright. They are jumping for experience. But mysteriously, the experiences are exclusively meant to gratify their desires, to break the norms and values, to disobey the superiors, to show off exceptionality.

No one spends a night in a slum to gather experience, but rarely any one stays at home on the New Year's eve (English). It is not an apathetic life which I want to preach. Youth is definitely the age to enjoy. But we do it the wrong way; not only the boys, the girls also.

Strangely though, I don't find as much male fans (who would have their walls and roofs covered with posters) of Steffi Graf or

Madhuri Dixit, as there are women with their apparently tinier rooms covered with life size posters of all sorts of Khans, worldwide (might even include Amjad Khan).

Setting their eyes in the sky the women's chief concentration lies on Hugh Grant or Tom Cruise. Having won and played with the hearts of neighbouring naive young men, they are now to get a glimpse of Humayun Ahmed or a slight (controversial) touch by Wasim Akram.

The age is for women's lib consequently, a dupatta is now too heavy to maintain on one's shoulders. It is rather a wonder how Indira Gandhi managed all her works, all her life, wearing all those awful sarees. It is a wonder again, why countries like Japan and China now emphasises a lot on their old beliefs and customs to keep away their children from westernisation.

The women now, walk the streets, work with men shoulder to shoulder, join processions, hold placards which read, 'we forgive you, Hugh Grant.' People like Hugh Grant are born to be forgiven and vice versa. Ask about women's prudence?

Observe a ten-year old boy and a ten-year old girl — then you'll get the exact answer. He plays with rockets, planes and guns... Things which would scare him to death had they been real; but she plays with dolls, decorates a toy house, cooks tasty dinners.

By the time she is twenty she is to get married anytime, and she knows too, exactly how to deal with home affairs. To her utter satisfaction, she aptly manages a completely henpecked husband.

I agree with my reader that, you are not like any of these kinds of characters. You are perhaps a true exception, like my cousin Arif had been.

(to be continued)

JUST after the completion of the HSC exams the headache for admission grips the examinees as well as their guardians. Nowadays, it is really very tough to get admission to Engineering, Medical, Architecture, BBA or to the honours courses of the universities. A

How Far is Admission Coaching Helpful?

good number of students belonging to the Science group vie for the limited number of seats of the Engineering University and the Medical Colleges. Most of them rush to different coaching centres of the city in order to get

prepared for the admission tests. Some quarters say that coaching at this particular level is beneficial to the students. But this saying may not apply to one and all.

The freshers of the higher secondary classes of the

students of average merit to get a chance to their coveted institutions. When coaching was not in the trend, it was difficult for a student of that category to come out successfully. Of course, this trend has deprived some meritorious students, specially those hailing from outside the capital. Those who are unable to manage accommodation during the coaching period and have financial constraint, cannot avail themselves of this opportunity. The students of comparatively less merit out-rival them only by virtue of having much practice.

Introduction of coaching has extensively increased competition in the admission tests. Though it develops the exam performance of the students, it makes them dependent on others afterwards. Medical and Engineering education are gradually going beyond the reach of the less privileged students and coaching is partially responsible for that. Under these circumstances admission coaching can be regarded as harmful.

The admission tests are held long after the completion of the HSC exams. The coaching centres fully utilize this interval. They are able to provide months of coaching to the students. A long-time coaching gives the students the chance to practise much and to become more familiar with the question patterns of the admission tests. As a result, the tests become competitive and quite unfortunately the competition remains confined mainly to the coaching going students. Consequently, some meritorious students, who are not in a position to go to coaching, cannot fare well in the tests. If the interval between the HSC exams and the admission test is reduced, the coaching-dependence will slump. Besides, the unfortunate students will get a chance to emulate the coaching dependent students. So, what we need is to expedite the publication of the HSC results and to hold the admission tests soon after that.

Coaching becomes helpful to those who are laborious and have a relatively strong base. The questioning patterns, followed for Medical and Engineering admission tests, remain almost the same every year. The coaching centres prepare similar standard of questions for their preparatory exams. Almost thirty to forty such exams are on their schedule. After completion of this schedule students become well adapted with the type of test for the admission. Then the admission test itself feels just like a model test of the coaching centre. Even a few of the admission test questions may become 'common' with that of the schedules of coaching.

The role played by the coaching centre, as mentioned earlier, has enabled

A Hypocritical Race

WE all know that the Miss Bangladesh beauty pageant is being viewed with mixed feelings. Some think that such contests are contradictory to our culture and Islamic values while others cannot find any feasible reason as to why we should not display feminine beauty and intelligence like most other countries.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Cultural Affairs has condemned beauty contests as being against our traditional cultural heritage. A meeting of the Board of Governors of the Islamic Foundation held on August 24, 95 under the auspices of the Religious Affairs Minister Muhammed Keramat Ali concluded with a similar verdict.

Naripokkho has also criticized the 1995 beauty contest, saying that it can neither be seen as a progressive step for women nor can it change their position in our society.

But what about the fashion show that was organized by the Women's Affairs Department at Eskaton on the concluding day of the two-day SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Women (August 30, 95)? When boiled down, isn't a fashion show the same thing as a beauty contest: the display of feminine beauty in fashionable clothing?

If the fashion show got away unscathed by the government and feminist groups, why is the beauty pageant being criticized despite the fact that the participating women in both occasions wore similar and modest clothes? If display of feminine beauty is against Bangladeshi tradition and Islamic law, how could the government permit and itself

MISS BANGLADESH



sponsor the fashion show? Was this double standard adopted to judge the foreign delegates?

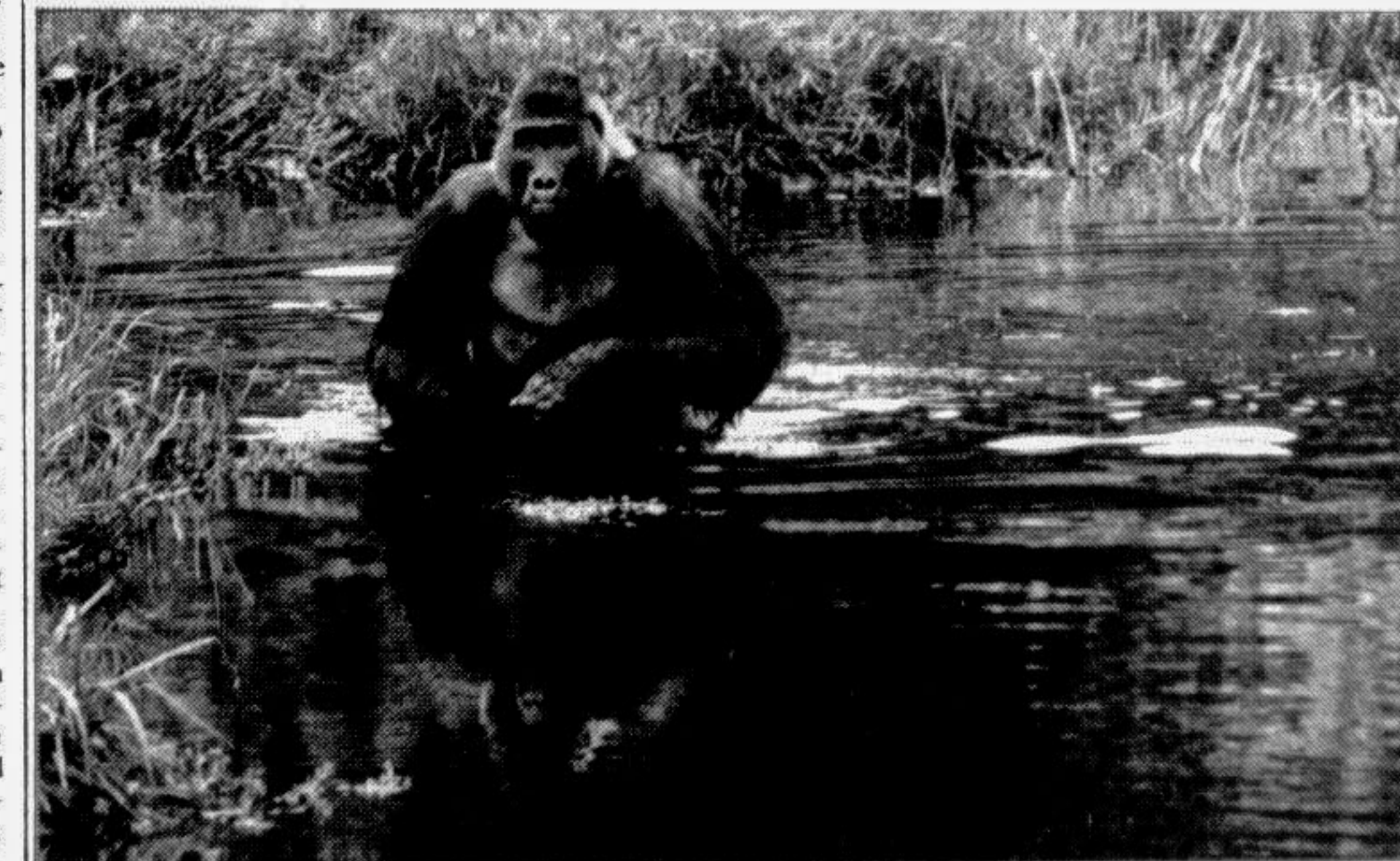
Or are we being told that the fashion show was permissible because it was sponsored by the government and the beauty pageant offensive to our modesty because it was

funded by some private source?

Whatever the reason, it would seem that Magsoodul Haque (lead singer of Feedback) was right; we Bengalis are basically a hypocritical race.

by Gulnaz Alam

Photo Feature



Water doesn't deter a hungry lowland gorilla cautiously edging toward a grassy patch in Mbali Bai. While it's not news that sedges serve as a starchy supplement to a gorilla's diet, biologists have only recently discovered that the apes will go wading to get them. The scientific wisdom had been that gorillas avoid water; in fact, streams were thought to have been barriers constraining gorilla distribution within Africa. The change in thinking took time — and so did this photograph, the first ever published of a lowland gorilla in water. Courtesy — National Geographic July 1995

by Ahmed Zamil